

The Public Disclosure Law

When Washington voters adopted Initiative 276 in 1972, they stated that the people wanted and had the right to know the financial affairs of candidates and elected officials in order to gauge whether a conflict may exist with government duties. The voters also declared that financing of election campaigns should be known and reported to the people.

What is a Political Committee?

A political committee is any person (except a candidate or an individual dealing with his or her own resources) who expects to receive contributions or make expenditures to support or oppose a candidate or ballot measure. The disclosure law applies to most groups organized to influence an election. Political parties, political action committees (PACs), and one-issue groups that disband after a single election are all political committees.

Proponents and opponents of state or local ballot measures that raise or spend money to support or oppose a ballot measure are also political committees.

What's the First Step?

Generally, committees must register with PDC within two weeks of being organized. However, if a committee organizes within three weeks of an election and will be active in that election, it must register within three business days of organizing. The registration statement (PDC Form C-1pc) identifies the committee's name, purpose, location, officers and the like. The original is filed with PDC; a copy goes to the county election office.

When registering, the committee will choose a reporting option. This choice is based on how much money the group intends to spend. Full reporting committees must file periodic disclosure reports (PDC Forms C-3 and C-4) showing contributions and expenditures.

Abbreviated Reporting

If the committee limits itself to receiving and spending \$2,000 or less and agrees to accept no more than \$200 from any source, it may select abbreviated reporting. This option relieves the committee of the obligation to file frequent, detailed financial reports.

Only two reports are required this year:

- * Registration Statement (Form C-1pc) — due within 2 weeks; due within 3 days if committee organizes within 3 weeks of election.
- * Abbreviated Receipts and Expenditures Report (ABB C-4) — filed by the 10th of the first month following the general or special election in which the committee participates.

Continuing committees using this option would also file:

- * Year-end Receipts and Expenditures Report (ABB C-4) — due on January 10, covering previous calendar year, from continuing committees that did not participate in elections during the previous year and, therefore, did not file a post-election report.
- * Registration Statement (Form C-1pc) — due each January if the committee plans to use abbreviated reporting that year, otherwise full reporting is expected.

Full Reporting

If the committee will raise or spend in excess of \$2,000, or it accepts over \$200 from one source, it must use the full reporting option and file reports according to the schedule on the right.

Required Reports Summary

Option	C-1pc	C-3	C-4
ABBREVIATED	Yes	No	Yes 12/10/99
FULL	Yes	Yes	Yes
		See Full Reporting Schedule	

1999

Full Reporting Schedule

C-3	Cash Receipts—all contributions must be deposited within 5 business days of receipt; fill out a C-3 for each deposit. Prior to July 1, C-3 may be sent with C-4; after July 1, mail C-3 reports weekly on Friday.
C-4	Summary of Receipts and Expenditures—due with initial C-1pc report if contributions were received or expenditures made.
C-4	Due by the 10th of each month if no other C-4 is required during that month and contributions or expenditures are over \$200 since last C-4.
C-4 Aug. 24	21 days before primary ¹
C-4 Sept. 7	7 days before primary ¹
C-4 Oct. 10	Post-primary report ²
C-4 Oct. 12	21 days before general
C-4 Oct. 26	7 days before general
C-4 Dec. 10	Post-general report

¹ General election ballot issue committees continue to file 10th of the month reports.

² Not required of general election ballot issue committees or continuing political committees.

If a continuing committee is not supporting or opposing candidates or ballot measures this year, it only files C-3 and C-4 reports on the 10th of the month if contributions or expenditures exceeded \$200 since the last C-4 report was filed. No 21- or 7- day or post-election reports are required.

Dates shown above are for 1999 primary and general elections only. Committees participating in special elections file C-4 reports 21 and 7 days before and on the 10th of the first month after that election.

Contribution Limits

A political committee may contribute no more than the following amounts to these recipients:

State Executive Candidate	\$1,150 in primary \$1,150 in general
State Legislative Candidate	575 in primary 575 in general
Local & Judicial Candidates	No State Limit*
Major or Minor State Political Party Committee	2,875 per year
County Central Committee	2,875 per year
Legislative District Committee	2,875 per year
Caucus Political Committee	575 per year
Ballot Proposition Committee & Others	No State Limit*

*\$5,000 maximum during the 21 days before the general election (\$50,000 maximum to a supreme court or state executive candidate). Check with local jurisdiction on other limits.

Committees may not accept anonymous contributions in excess of \$300 per year or 1% of all contributions received in a year, whichever is greater.

Committees may not accept more than \$5,000 in the aggregate from one source during the last 21 days before a general election, except from the state party committee.

Special reports are required for contributions over \$500 during certain time frames. See instruction manual.

A political committee, prior to making a contribution to a state office candidate, must have received—during the 180 days before making the contribution—contributions of \$10 or more from at least 10 people registered to vote in Washington.

Out-Of-State and Federal PACs

Committees not located in Washington State and PACs registered under federal law may contribute to in-state candidates and committees. No prior registration with PDC is required. Note above qualification on giving to state office candidates, however.

Within 10 days after making a contribution, the out-of-state or federal committee must file a report showing each contribution made, the Washingtonians who have given to the committee, and the committee officers (PDC Form C-5). Failure to file the report will result in the contribution being returned or forfeited to the state general fund.

Political Advertising

Campaign ads must satisfy the political advertising provisions of the disclosure law. Detailed information is contained in campaign reporting instructions and the brochure on political advertising.

Most political ads must identify the sponsor paying for the ads. Print ads need to include the sponsor's name and address. In radio and TV ads the sponsor's name must be clearly spoken. Use the phrase "Paid for by" or "Sponsored by" before the ID information. In partisan campaigns, all ads and signs must show the candidate's political party. Political ads not undertaken in conjunction with a candidate must carry additional, special identification.

Treasurer

The committee treasurer is critical to the campaign. Frequently, the treasurer must devote considerable time and effort to implementing record keeping and reporting requirements of the disclosure law. Only the treasurer may authorize expenditures and sign reports for a political committee.

Records

The key to campaign finance reporting is up-to-date, detailed records of each contribution and expenditure. Open a separate bank account for the committee.

Report all campaign income (contributions, loans, pledges, personal funds, etc.) and expenditures, including orders placed but not paid. All bank deposit slips, bank statements, receipts and cancelled checks should be kept as part of the record.

The law specifies that records be kept for five years after the campaign ends.

Political Committee Reporting Guide



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